

thing-soul





13 April – 22 May 2014

cathie pilkington

thing-soul

I. Four heads
xxxx xxxx xxxx xxxx xxxx
Cover: Siren 2014

Marlborough Fine Art
6 Albemarle Street
London W1S 4BY
t: +44 (0) 20 7629 5161
e: mfa@marlboroughfineart.com
www.marlboroughfineart.com

thing-soul

by benedict carpenter

A young girl reclines in the manner of a Henry Moore, which is itself in imitation of the Mayan god, Chac Mool. Two bald but otherwise fawn-like legs emerge from under her pleated skirt, ending in a pair of dainty red shoes, one not quite tapping the ground. Cast in bronze but apparently an assembly of jointed parts, variously painted and in other areas bare metal, this toy-like creature is an aggregation of familiar and semi-familiar things: mannequin, girl, doll, beast, sculpture.

This sort of ambivalence is familiar in Cathie Pilkington's art, which plays with status, straddling an ill-determined space between high-art quotation and immediate, material engagement. In this, her work is consistent with a tradition of sculptural appropriation in which dummy or doll is reframed as art-object. This move has become so conventional that objects born beyond art's purview are rehabilitated without surprise, and displayed alongside artworks with legitimate critical patrimony. It is a familiar scene to see a Hans Bellmer or Chapman Brothers sculpture, arch presentations of the doll-dildo slave-object, breaking bread with one of Morton Bartlett's more emotionally conceived love-surrogates,¹ those strange and meticulous dolls that emerged after their maker's death.

Even the shop mannequin has undergone apotheosis, most notably in the extraordinary case of Pierre Imans' wax figures (1910's), whose gimlet-eyed perfection attracted Mike Kelley² to the extent that they were curated into his project on *The Uncanny*, and whose work now fetches art-world prices. Indeed, as a subject, the mannequin is one of art's more familiar transgressions, with an apogee in the Surrealism of the 1930's, and a rich contemporary legacy.³

While the dummy's re-categorisation might appear as an extension of curatorial generosity, the logic of the galley is to enclose, an act of conceptual 'vitrinisation' that de-vivifies through elevation.⁴ The engaged, worldly content and repressed cues of such figuration remain to test the viewer's boundaries. But the object no longer demands an irrational response, or stands ready for our use. Any such attempt would be trespass.

Pilkington's work develops art's appropriation of the dummy in a contrary direction. In many instances it is formally identical to a school of sculpture that is confident in its skilled material being, in a way that seems a little old-fashioned, almost nineteenth century. In other words, her work begins as 'Art'; but it slides from this elevated position, and threatens to make itself available to the viewer in the *manner* of a dolly, on more intimate terms than the art-world's customarily mediated object / viewer relation.

Pilkington's work might not demand the viewer's love, but it does demand something. It asks the viewer to invent and to imagine, approaching the immediacy of ordinary figurative playthings. At times this has been achieved through their exhibition outside the gallery,

most notably in the Museum of Childhood (2012), when her work was displayed alongside ordinary toys.⁵ However, in this new body of sculpture, Pilkington has found a way to keep the work alive within the gallery's walls, and without answering Fine Art's Enlightenment prioritisation of the mind⁶ with recourse to simple ideas of touch. If status-play is a legitimate and mainstream contemporary art tactic, in Pilkington's work, it becomes a means for intimating ideas about figuration that were last considered orthodox in an earlier time, the Middle Ages, or the nursery.

The title of this exhibition is a quotation from Rainer Maria Rilke's famous essay, *On Dolls* (1913). This describes the doll's ambiguous and compound objecthood, an understanding of which is useful in approaching Pilkington's work.⁷

In order to locate what Rilke sees as the unusual ingratitude of these objects, he first discusses the grateful, melancholic power of 'perfectly simple things'. Through daily use, these non-figurative objects acquire a 'Something', a pattern of familiarity that 'breathes new life into them', even as they are worn down. Nearly twenty years later, the quality that Rilke fails to name – this 'Something' – Walter Benjamin was to identify as 'aura', a special quality of proximity and human-likeness, held in tension by a sense of distance or loss.⁸ For Benjamin, as for Rilke, an object acquires aura through physical contact, either with a person, or through a pattern of social use or ritual. Thus, where Rilke writes of 'the smiles and misery secreted in jewels which have been often worn', in Benjamin's celebrated essay on bourgeois photography, we read of 'an aura that had seeped into the very folds of the man's frock coat or floppy cravat'.⁹ For both authors, ordinary things acquire a history of the wearer, and act as stores of social presence.

But unlike Benjamin, Rilke draws a clear distinction between non-figurative things that acquire liveliness, and figurative playthings that acquire a similar aura, but one that is made sharper by the dolls' 'horrible dense forgetfulness', and their capacity for death. For while the animating spirit of dumb objects is written into them irreversibly, to accrue as a melancholic power, the vivacity of dolls is evanescent. Rilke's conception of the doll is as a site of animation, rather than a store of memories, more akin to a cinema screen than a book, requiring constant projection, constant care, to stay alive.

This distinction displaces what Rilke describes as the location of the object's 'soul'. In non-figurative things, the soul dwells inside the object, simply. But the 'doll-soul' is harder to situate, and seems to belong neither to the child, nor to the object, but in a much more dangerous, liminal space between the two. The 'doll-thing' is a sculptural home, the sculpted *picture* of a doll. By contrast, the 'doll-soul' is the *image* of the doll, its identity, which depends for its existence both on the physical body of its object, and also on the attention of the child.

But, in the final passage of the essay the sense of dependency is inverted. Here, the author recognises that the doll's need has its counterpart in the child, a need so powerful that it both undermines and quickens the physical essence of the doll; and when the adult reenounters the plaything of his youth, it serves as a mnemonic prompt, not for the identity of the doll-soul, but rather for memories of playing with a dumb thing. These memories live within the doll's body, and consume it from within, like the 'larvae' of a 'moth', killing it completely.¹⁰

Readers familiar with David Freedberg's landmark publication, *The Power of Images* (1989), might recognise in Rilke's text a presentiment of the critical attitude that seeks to uncover, from its analysis of past cultures, the logic of images that our culture has learned to repress, or feigns to forget. Exactly such repression is enshrined in the disembodiment of architecture of modern galleries, and the conceptual vitrinisation of culture, the prophylaxis by which the viewer is insulated from an embodied response to art. But as Freedberg puts it, 'A history of art that stands back from the natural symptoms of response merely toys with the small change of intellectualism'.¹¹ So too, it could be said, a practice that distains to seduce the viewer; that plays only to the circle of the mind and never to the gallery of the body, merely toys with the small change of what it is to be a human.

True to its name, Pilkington's *Siren* calls to the viewer: It is a queasily seductive object, part shop-counter mannequin, part Odalisque in pantyhose. Her nipples, one of them barely concealed beneath the tassel of a pastel bow, glow with a pale rosy tinge. Her physical comportment is a direct appeal to male interest, further provoked by her somewhat pointed, adolescent breasts, an incitement of sexual dubiety on which this dolly rests, like a siren on her rock. This not-quite living-doll solicits the viewer's projection, the viewer's desire for her to be alive; but her face has the mute indifference, the 'horrible forgetfulness', of a dummy.

Like *Siren*, several other works in this exhibition play with an idea of coming-into-being. *Twinkle*'s strangely etiolated form is reminiscent of a ghost, her feet only just in contact with the plinth. The top part of her body is rendered in shades of grey, her closed eyes suggesting a purely inward presence, like the spirit of a sleepwalker. By contrast, the bottom half of the sculpture is richly textured bronze, painted in an assertive recollection of the blanket from which the pattern for this form was made. Both sculptures are torn between a quickening refutation of their physical being, in which they come alive, and an assertion of their made nature, their factual presence, in which they die as dolls. *Siren* and *Twinkle* are haunted objects, whether haunted by the interest of the viewer; their maker; or their own pictorial logic.

Just as much as Pilkington's work engages the imagination of the viewer, this tendency is held in check by other cues that pull the viewer back from a complete immersion in narrative or play. There are several objects in this show that demonstrate a use of repeated forms, modelled, cast in multiples, reused and recombined. Thus the heads of *Twinkle* and *Siren* reappear as sculptural busts elsewhere, further asserting their dumb physical nature, and undermining the objects' vivacity. This process is also employed in Pilkington's collages, in which elements of her prints are cut up and reprocessed. This presents a further analogy with dolls, which are similarly disjointed combinations of repeated parts. Pilkington's images, both drawn and sculpted, appear at first glance as believable organic wholes; but when they are examined for any length of time, they cycle through appearing variously disjointed and entire, by turns dead and alive.

In this, Pilkington's work shows a profound understanding of the nature of pictorial representation. As W.J.T. Mitchel observed, nearly 90 years after Rilke had entertained strikingly similar thoughts: 'The picture wants to hold, to arrest, to mummify an image in silence and slow time. Once it has achieved its desire, however, it is driven to move, to speak, to dissolve, to repeat itself'.¹² The paradox of this desire is evident in the very concept of

life, which is dependent on stability, but equally dependent on a capacity for reproduction, a crucial instability. So too, in this exhibition, a sculpture holds an image of a girl; but the image leaves its bronze body to inhabit the imagination of the viewer; or to take up residence in another work, under a different guise. Indeed, this is a general truth of art; the history of our images is testimony to their extraordinary and mutable endurance: thus the image of the Mayan god Chac Mool is parted from his sculpted picture, to inhabit first a Henry Moore Reclining Figure of 1929,¹³ and now, in this exhibition, *Reclining Doll*.

A sculpture or a painting is essential to sustain an image; but these forms can also bind too tightly. Pilkington's strategy to elude such mummification is to suggest, but not to state too clearly. Indeed, there is something out-of-focus in the depiction of faces in this show, whose features have been applied to evoke their presence without fixing it securely. Thus, the blurred face of *Photo* appears to be haunted by an identity that never quite arrives, like a memory at the edge of recollection, while *Fresco* bears the trace of multiple, layered identities, which stutter around its surface on the brink of articulation.

This instability is a significant clue to the nature of animation in Pilkington's work – it would seem that, in the manner of Rilke's dolls, these sculptures are made to live, that is to say *made unique*, only in the *imagination* of the viewer: Like the image of movie star on a picture screen, these works come alive only in the moment of the viewer's animation, warming under the flickering gaze of the viewer's animating projection, something between an image and a picture, 'soul' and 'thing'

Endnotes

¹ As in the case of the group exhibition *The Vivisector*, Sprüth Magers, London, November 23rd 2012 – January 26th 2013. This show brought Morton Bartlett's figures together with work by Hans Bellmer and photographs of sexual dummies by Cindy Sherman.

² Kelley, M. (2004) *The Uncanny*, Cologne: Tate Liverpool / Walter König, p. 76

³ Welchman, J. (2004) 'On the Uncanny in Visual Culture', in Kelley, M. *The Uncanny*, Cologne: Tate Liverpool / Walter König, pp. 39 – 54. See page 52.

⁴ For a book-length study of the logic of gallery architecture, see: O'Doherty, B. (1999) *Inside the White Cube*, The Ideology of the Gallery Space, London: The University of California Press

⁵ Cathie Pilkington, *The Value of the Paw*, V&A Museum of Childhood, London, 14 January – 7 May 2012

⁶ For a discussion of this see: Greenhalgh, P. (1997) 'The history of craft', in: Dormer, P. (ed.), *The culture of craft: status and future*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 20-52

⁷ Rilke (1994/1913-1914) 'On Dolls' in: Parry, I. (ed) *Essays on Dolls*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 2- 6

⁸ Benjamin's position on aura is ambivalent, and requires close reading. For the classic text on aura, albeit one that presents an untypically undialectical take on the subject, see: Benjamin, W. (2008/1936) 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility: Second Version' in: Jennings, M., Doherty, B., and Levin, T. (eds) *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, pp. 19-55

⁹ Benjamin, W. (2008/1931) 'Little History of Photography' in: Jennings, M., Doherty, B., and Levin, T. (eds) *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, pp. 274-299

¹⁰ The doll's death is a startling inversion of the process by which other objects have aura written into them. Here the store of memories, acquired through physical contact, destroys the object.

¹¹ Freedberg, D. (1991 / 1989) *The Power of Images*, London: University of Chicago Press, p. 282

¹² Mitchell, W.J.T. (2005) *What do pictures want?* London: University of Chicago Press, p. 72

¹³ In Leeds City Art Gallery



2. Lady Dolls 3 2013
wood, clay, wool, synthetic wig, 37 x 12 x 12cm

3. Lady Dolls 1 2012
wood, clay, fabric and paint, 39 x 15 x 14cm

4. Lady Dolls 2 2012
wood, clay, fabric, paint, 33 x 14 x 14cm





5. Dirty Love Pillow 2014
fabric, clay and paint on granite, 26 x 40 x 30cm
6. Northern Landscape 2014
Patinated bronze, synthetic wig, 21 x 41 x 30cm





7. Infanta 2013
wood, clay and paint, 12 x 18 x 10cm



8. Reclining Nude I 2012
wood, clay, paint, fabric doll parts, 23 x 40 x 26cm

9. Man-Ray 2013
wood, clay, wood, fabric, paint, 22 x 24 x 33cm





10. Femme Maison 2012
wood, clay, fabric, paint, doll parts, 32 x 15 x 9cm
11. Girl with Goat 2012
Wood, clay, paint, 43 x 19 x 21cm
12. El Shaddai 2013
Oil paint on patinated bronze, 22 x 7 x 7cm
13. Postcard 2013
wood, clay, dolls head, 35 x 19 x 14cm



14. Black Heart 2013
wood, clay, fabric, paint, doll parts, 53 x 40 x 16cm



15. Cushla 2012
Wood, clay, fabric and paint, 56 x 18 x 18cm



16. Marie Therese 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster, 30 x 20 x 17cm



17. Vollard Suite 2014
Oil paint on patinated bronze, 35 x 18 x 16cm



18. Weeping Woman 2014
Oil paint on patinated bronze, 33 x 12 x 12cm



19. Pink Doll 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster; 27 x 15 x 13cm

20. Photo 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster; 28 x 20 x 18cm





21. Fresco 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster, 30 x 16 x 14cm



22. Reclining Doll 2013
Oil paint on patinated bronze with birch ply base,
43 x 77 x 40cm



23. Siren 2014
Oil paint on resin, 64 x 73 x 48cm



24. Dummy 2014 (reclining figure)
Oil paint on resin, 64 x 118 x 42cm

25. Twinkle 2014 (standing figure)
Oil paint on bronze with painted bronze base,
150 x 41 x 34cm



works on paper



26. Fruit, Root and It 2013
xxxx xxxxx, xxxx xxxx xxxx



27. Degas Dolly
32x23cm



28. Wooden
20x20cm



29. Seamstress
29x38cm



30. Prop
18x37cm



32. Reclining Doll
18x25cm



31. Beautiful Thing
25x31cm



33. Constructed horse
24x36cm



34. Dolly Day
20x32cm



35. Inbetween
36x26cm



36. Bright Eyes
39x30cm



37. Self Portrait
25x23cm

38. Exquisite Corpse
41x25cm



list of works

1.

Four heads XXXX (inside cover)
xxxx xxxxxxxx, xxx xxx xxxxx xxxx
2.

Lady Dolls 3 2013
wood, clay, wool, synthetic wig, 37 x 12 x 12cm
3.

Lady Dolls 1 2012
wood, clay, fabric and paint, 39 x 15 x 14cm
4.

Lady Dolls 2 2012
wood, clay, fabric, paint, 33 x 14 x14cm
5.

Dirty Love Pillow 2014
fabric, clay and paint on granite, 26 x 40 x 30cm
6.

Northern Landscape 2014
Patinated bronze, synthetic wig, 21 x 41 x 30cm
7.

Infanta 2013
wood, clay and paint, 12 x 18 x 10cm
8.

Reclining Nude 1 2012
wood, clay, paint, fabric doll parts, 23 x 40 x 26cm
9.

Man-Ray 2013
wood, clay, wood, fabric, paint, 22 x 24 x 33cm
10.

Femme Maison 2012
wood, clay, fabric, paint, doll parts, 32 x 15 x 9cm
11.

Girl with Goat 2012
Wood, clay, paint, 43 x 19 x 21cm
12.

El Shaddai 2013
Oil paint on patinated bronze, 22 x 7 x 7cm
13.

Postcard 2013
wood, clay, dolls head, 35 x 19 x 14cm
14.

Black Heart 2013
wood, clay, fabric, paint, doll parts, 53 x 40 x 16cm
15.

Cushla 2012
Wood, clay, fabric and paint, 56 x 18 x 18cm
16.

Marie Therese 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster, 30 x 20 x 17cm
17.

Vollard Suite 2014
Oil paint on patinated bronze, 35 x 18 x16cm
18.

Weeping Woman 2014
Oil paint on patinated bronze, 33 x 12 x 12cm
19.

Pink Doll 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster, 27 x 15 x 13cm
20.

Photo 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster, 28 x 20 x 18cm

21.

Fresco 2013
Oil paint on hardened plaster; 30 x 16 x 14cm
22.

Reclining Doll 2013
Oil paint on patinated bronze with birch ply base, 43 x 77 x 40cm
23.

Siren 2014
Oil paint on resin, 64 x 73 x 48cm
24.

Dummy 2014 (reclining figure)
Oil paint on resin, 64 x118 x 42cm
25.

Twinkle 2014 (standing figure)
Oil paint on bronze with painted bronze base, 150 x 41 x 34cm
26.

Fruit, Root and It XXXX
xxxxxxxxxxxxx, xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx
27.

Degas Dolly
32x23cm
28.

Wooden
20x20cm
29.

Seamstress
29x38cm
30.

Prop
18x37cm
31.

Beautiful Thing
25x31cm
32.

Reclining Doll
18x25cm
33.

Constructed horse
24x36cm
34.

Dolly Day
20x32cm
35.

Inbetween
36x26cm
36.

Bright Eyes
39x30cm
37.

Self Portrait
25x23cm
38.

Exquisite Corpse
41x25cm

works on paper

biography

education

1995-1997 Royal College of Art.
1985-1991 Edinburgh College of Art.
1984-1985 North Cheshire College.

employment

2000-2004 Camberwell College of Art.
1997-2000 Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Art.
1991-1995 Edinburgh College of Art.
1991-1995 Leith School of Art.

solo exhibitions

- 2012

The Value of the Paw,V&A Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green, London
- 2010

Peaceable Kingdom, Marlborough Fine Art, London
- 2009

Toby Jugs and other works Space Station 65, London
- 2007

White Elelephant, Marlborough Fine art, London.
- 2005

Garden, Program, London.
- 2004

I'm a Winner! The Apartment, Athens. Curio, Space Station 65, London.
- 2003

Homunculus, The Economist Plaza, London.
- 2000

Short Stories, Galway Arts Centre, Ireland.
- 1998

Viva Chihuahua! Prema, Uley, Gloucestershire.

selected exhibitions

- 2012

Never Promised Pound Land, No Format Gallery, Woolwich, London
- 2010

Bedizzened. APT London
- 2009

Three Women Arts from Marlborough,Gallery Arque, Lisbon
- 2009

Bad Animals,Transition Gallery, London
- 2008

That's Entertainment, Whitstable Biennale, Kent
- 2008

Carnitown, Space Station 65, London
- 2008

Arque Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2007

The Craft,Transition Gallery, London.
- 2006

The Craft,The Metropole Gallery, Folkstone. Summer Exhibition, Marlborough Fine Art, London
- 2005

Engerland! OneOtwo,The Tea Buildings, London.

- 2003

Emporium, Domo Baal, London. Flock,The Model Arts Centre, Sligo, Ireland. Off the Leash, Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield. Captive Bred, Bolton City Art Gallery.
- 2002

Royal Academy Summer Show.
- 2001

For the love of dog, Battersea Pumphouse Gallery. Auras and Avatars,The First Public School, Greece. Animal,The Collective Gallery, Edinburgh.
- 2000

Mandarina Duck Awards, Milan, Italy. Fathom,The Study Gallery, Poole, Dorset. Glory Hole, Magri Walk,Whitechapel, London. Sculpture, Malmsbury Abbey and Gloucester Cathedral.
- 1999

Dub Housing, Steirscher Herbst 99, Austria. Rover, Manchester City Art Gallery. Medway Open, Rochester Art Gallery.
- 1998

False Economy, Gasworks. London. Viva Chihuahua!The Tannery, London.
- 1997

Kettle Blue, Gallery Beaumont, Luxembourg. Atrium, Charing Cross, London.
- 1991

Hot House, Kew Gardens, London. John Watson Prize, Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

collections and awards

- 2000

Manchester City Art Gallery.
- 1999

L.A.B award to individual Artists.
- 1997

Fine Art Research Fellowship, Cheltenham.

public commissions

- 2000

@ Bristol, Harbourside, Bristol.
- 2005

Evalina Childrens Hospital, London.

selected biography

- 2012

The Medal, Spring 2012,The Value of the Hand, Benedict Carpenter
- 2012

ArtLyst, 5 March,The Value ofThe Paw V&A Museum of Childhood. Cathie Pilkington Kate Middleton's East London Children's Museum Visit <http://www.fluxlings.com/index.php/cathie-pilkington-london-art-show/>
- 2010

TheWeek,Where To Buy, 11 December:This is London Magazine.
- 2007

The Guardian Weekend Magazine, 10 March 07, Cathie Pilkington Art interview.

marlborough

london

Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd
6 Albemarle Street
London, W1S 4BY
Telephone: +44-(0)20-7629 5161
Telefax: +44-(0)20-7629 6338
mfa@marlboroughfineart.com
info@marlboroughgraphics.com
www.marlboroughfineart.com

Marlborough Contemporary
6 Albemarle Street
London, W1S 4BY
Telephone: +44-(0)20-7629 5161
Telefax: +44-(0)20-7629 6338
info@marlboroughcontemporary.com
www.marlboroughcontemporary.com

new york

Marlborough Gallery Inc.
40 West 57th Street
New York, N.Y. 10019
Telephone: +1-212-541 4900
Telefax: +1-212-541 4948
mny@marlboroughgallery.com
www.marlboroughgallery.com

Marlborough Chelsea
545 West 25th Street
New York, N.Y. 10001
Telephone: +1-212-463 8634
Telefax: +1-212-463 9658
chelsea@marlboroughgallery.com

Marlborough Broome Street
331 Broome St.
New York, N.Y. 10002
Telephone: +1-212-219-8926
Telefax: +1-212-219-8965
broomestreet@marlboroughchelsea.com
www.marlboroughchelsea.com/broome-st/exhibitions

madrid

Galería Marlborough SA
Orfila 5
28010 Madrid
Telephone: +34-91-319 1414
Telefax: +34-91-308 4345
info@galeriamarlborough.com
www.galeriamarlborough.com

barcelona

Marlborough Barcelona
Valencia, 284, 1r 2a A
Barcelona, 08007
Telephone: +34-93-467 4454
Telefax: +34-93-467 4451
infobarcelona@galeriamarlborough.com

monte carlo

Marlborough Monaco
4 Quai Antoine 1er
MC 98000 Monaco
Telephone: +377-9770 2550
Telefax: +377-9770 2559
art@marlborough-monaco.com
www.marlborough-monaco.com

santiago

Galería A.M.S. Marlborough
Avenida Nueva Costanera 3723
Vitacura, Santiago, Chile
Telephone: +56-2-799 3180
Telefax: +56-2-799 3181
info@amsgaleria.cl
www.amsgaleria.cl



